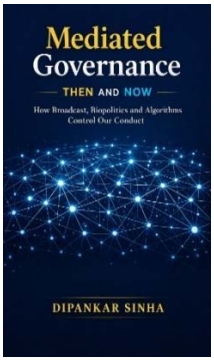
# Book Preview




## *Mediated Governance Then and Now: How Broadcast, Biopolitics and Algorithms Control Our Conduct*

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**Keywords:** Mediation; Surveillance; Media; Communication; Public; Foucault; Algorithms; Artificial Intelligence (AI); Data society; Platform governance.

*The book intensively explores the governance techniques of control of public conduct in the context of mediation. Published in Michel Foucault's birth centenary year, it draws on his historic formulations — "governmentality" and "conduct of conduct" — but expands them to the contemporary times to trace the evolution of surveillance from the pre-digital past to the digital present.*
*The analysis covers three sequential phases: i) The Broadcast era and the people-as-mass audience; ii) The Biopolitical epoch and the people-as-aggregates; iii) The Algorithmic time with people-as-data points. In its endeavour to highlight an under-focused area the book unravels how the innovative and unique mediating strategies of each phase unleash modulation of the identity of the public in the name of governance.*
*Written in a lucid and engaging way, the book will be useful for academics, researchers and advanced students in social sciences and humanities. It will also be of interest to general readers seeking an appropriate and updated understanding of the behind-the-scene maneuvering of governance for nearly nine decades.*

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The act of governing has attracted public attention from the time immemorial, but despite being under constant glare much of its backroom operation remain hidden from public knowledge and scrutiny. A major reason for it is that those who are in charge of governing have meticulously devised strategies and tactics to control the conduct of people from time to time. While efforts to identify the hidden transcripts of governing are being made in practical and theoretical realms it is time to candidly acknowledge the fact that such efforts are yet to reach the desirable level of transparency and accountability. Since the 1990s the specialised concept of 'governance' has steadily acquired the limelight to the extent of gaining the status of a buzzword, but even an optimist would not dare to say that 'we the people' have an adequate understanding of how we are being governed. This is exactly where the scope for further interventions lie.

One important intervention is to analyse the integral modes of mediation in the act of governing in general and its control mechanism in particular. The book ventures in that direction.

The year 2026 marks the birth centenary of Michel Foucault and it is a perfect moment, linking the past and the present, to re-visit one of his key concepts, governmentality (gouvernementalité, in original French) for our purpose. Foucault defined government as the "conduct of conduct" and governmentality as the "*art of government* — in the broadest sense — that is, the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific *power* that has as its target population…". It inscribes rationalities, techniques, institutions, and imaginaries through which *populations*, the masses managed by state agencies, are rendered knowable and governable.

The book identifies and explains the contemporary mode of governing people with Foucault in mind. Foucault offers one of the most insightful conceptual vocabularies for understanding how modern power operates through knowledge rather than merely over territory or law. His granular analyses of sovereignty, discipline, biopolitics, and governmentality are especially challenging for scrutinising the postcolonial states in which the 'modern' subtle techniques of controlling population coexist with the 'traditional', feudal/semi-feudal, coercive/semi-coercive forms of authority. Our primary goal is to understand the graded power-play in the transition effected by periodic shifts in mediation vis-à-vis governance and public subjectivity. Simply put, the effort is to trace within the broad framework of governance the remaking of the publics and publicness effected by the metamorphosis of the nation-minded mediated governmentality to the algorithmic-friendly genre. The analytical framework has a normative slant, both manifest and latent, which is supposed to counter the possibility of falling into technological reductionism. If that is not all, even more provocatively, the analysis treats mainstream media as a key political actor in generating a specific kind of governmentality, and by this logic, not as a secondary cultural ally or tool of the governing regimes.

The book incorporates the conceptual and historical trajectory of governmentality in a manner which synthesises, without a fixed centre of gravity, the simultaneity of continuity and change. When it concerns *mediated governmentality one finds its large-scale absence in the mainstream academic* literature. This is so despite the plethora of works on *governmentality,* and on media communication, media governance, digital governance and so forth. A major reason for such blind spot may be the long held idea that media being basically representational, fall outside the 'pure' domain of governance and technologies of rule. On the other hand, the analytical orientation of media studies did not address the governmentality question the way it should have been.

Throughout the book this contention will surface again and again. Suffice is to state at this point, this makes *mediated governmentality* a perfect case for mainstreaming. Obviously, mediation lies at the foundation of mediated governmentality. In treating mediation as a constitutive process the book eschews the 'transmission' perspective in which media are mechanically seen as channels through which information circulates. Even if this act of media is undeniable this perspective reduces media to an external variable acting upon pre-existing social and political realities. Mediation for us is the structured ensemble of symbolic (representational), institutional (infrastructural) and computational (digital) practices through which a certain kind of social reality, basically constructed, becomes intelligible, actionable and governable. The book is not obsessed with the question how mainstream media influence governance. The purpose is to indulge more into the exploration of how mediation produces the conditions under which certain sets of political action, public reasoning and administrative intervention are created from time to time.

To further expand the theme of the book, there is a question as its point of departure: how does a profoundly mediated transformation shift the goalpost of control from the making of 'national citizens' to their remaking as 'data points'? The question may apparently sound polemical but an in-depth consideration will reveal something more. The transformation in our view is profound because it unravels how power operates through media(tion), how publics are imagined and public life organised, and

consequentially how political subjectivity itself is being reconfigured from the days of taught citizenship to those of monetised (digital) datafication and data extraction.

While the intellectually creative efforts deserve appreciation for branching out the Foucauldian framework much of this literature suffers from five blind spots which this book seeks to address and overcome. The following points collectively may be treated as parts of the analytical spine of the book.

First, in the dominant orientation of the Foucauldian media studies, media are often conceptualised and interpreted as informational and communicative sites with the predominant focus on representation, ideology, or on framing and priming. Such orientation underestimates the operational power of print and broadcast media, and the later growth of platforms, algorithms, metrics and databases.

Second, even when such studies take up the issue digital media they mostly use the lens of surveillance and discipline. There is nothing wrong in it, but the problem arises when such lens tends to obscure the emergence of new forms of media power that operate through prediction, optimisation and behavioural modulation.

Third, a bit mechanically the Foucauldian media studies view digital governance primarily as an extension of existing rationalities, which underestimates the possibility of departures from earlier forms of mediated citizenship.

Fourth, it is also important to point out, especially in the context of the postcolonial societies that they are passing through a complicated stage of institutional instability as far as states and media ecosystem are concerned. Foucauldian analyses often condescendingly assume historically stable institutions within which media is supposed to operate. Yet, there are numerous cases of media going much beyond its conventionally assumed role as channels of information, often outsmarting other institutions of the society.

The fifth blind spot is that be it the earlier era or be it the contemporary times the governing rationalities of the media do not ever guarantee liberally constituted full-scale citizenship. The modus operandi concerns only partial inclusion, conditional rights and administrative categorisation, the major development being that with the changing times such acts have become more subtle, distant, sophisticated, tech smart and more constraining for publics.

Accordingly, the book begins with the discussion on how media in their earlier incarnation functioned as an institutional bridge between state, public reason and instructed citizenship. Then it goes on to show how various factors leads media to undergo periodic makeover, from instruction to conduct to modulation, thereby displaying a strong survival instinct.

Chapter I as the *Introduction* focuses on the book's foundational concept, governmentality. For obvious reasons, it begins with the Foucauldian framework, but specifies why it should be approached in the lens of mediation, with media as proactive entities. In doing so, the communicative core in governmentality, is emphasised. The chapter promises to expand the core question: how does mediation contribute to the changing dynamics in the 'conduct of conduct' of populations from time to time?

Chapter II on *Mass Media and Imagi-Nation* is concerned with print and broadcast media as major actors in instrumentalising a classic genre of governmentality in the postcolonial context. It extensively deals with the pedagogical and instructional nation-building exercise which targets the 'mass' in the pre-citizenship stage.

Chapter III on *Statistics Meeting Biopolitics* has the initial focus on the 'politics of numbers' as manifested by quantification and measurement of administering people. Statistics is viewed here more as a back-up

for biopolitical exercise of conducting the conduct of populations as aggregates. It then elaborates how media practices play a key role in transforming data and biopolitical norms into 'common sense', and locates a revolutionary shift in the media scenario.

Chapter IV titled *Power-Information-Power Dialectic* marks an intermediary mode of positioning information in the interplay of continuity and change. In curating information from both media and non-media sources, the discussion foregrounds the sequential modalities named as *powering information* and *informatising power*, to reveal why algorithmic governmentality was not a sudden and abrupt shift. The analysis relates the existing Foucauldian framework to the critical works of James C. Scott, Gilles Deleuze and Manuel Castells.

Chapter V on *The Algorithmic Juggernaut* points to a decisive shift in power equations entrenched in algorithmic governmentality. It explains how — controlled by artificial intelligence, virality and social media platforms — this shift paves the way for yet another genre of mediated governmentality. The discussion also scrutinises the works of Baudrillard, Rouvroy and other eminent scholars to bring media-centric scholarship closer to the study of algorithms as a newly dominant governing entity. It is also pointed out that postcolonial settings offer greater scope to understand the extractive capacity and heightening asymmetries of algorithmic governance, carried out by substituting rather than supplementing right-bearing citizenship and accountability.

The book concludes with a pragmatic note on the (*Im)Possibility of Resistance* in such challenging times as now. It provides a bottom-line that viability of effective and durable resistance hangs on a paradoxical pivot — to gain epistemological and empirical momentum by leveraging digital power while simultaneously securing autonomy from excessive automated control.

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Dipankar Sinha. *Mediated Governance Then and Now: How Broadcast, Biopolitics and Algorithms Control Our Conduct*, Social Science Digital Hub. 2026.

**ISBN:** 9798233370977
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